1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

796 535 men and women exchange gossip and sit about, joining in the songs or merely observing the proceedings, while the young people form part of the singing, dancing circle that revolves almost without pause about the central post of the *tonnelle*, the shelter where the festivities are held.

796 To speak of discipline in connection with these dances is to evoke new and astonishing images for readers familiar with the more popular literature on Haiti. It is admittedly true that as one first witnesses a *vodun* dance, one's reaction is that this is a performance governed solely by the dictates of individual possession. These ceremonies are usually held at night, deep in the bush, lighted only by a small, smoking oil lamp and by the candles fastened to the pegs of the drums, while the participants dress in anything but their best clothing, and in their belts the men carry the machetes always worn by the Haitian peasant. Add to this the effect of the unceasing rhythms of the drumming, the blanket of sound from the unison singing of the participants, the violence of the possessions, and it is not strange that the untrained observer tends to assess what he sees in almost any terms but those of the underlying discipline that defines all activity in the worship of the gods. A release of psychic tension is undoubtedly afforded those who become possessed, and this is also experienced to a lesser degree by all those in attendance. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized, despite so much that has been written to the contrary, that this form of worship of the *loa* is neither unrestrained hysteria nor drunken orgiastic satisfaction of the sex drive. The behavior of the participants, in terms of the accepted patterns of European and American religious decorum, often seems uncouth, vigorous, violent, and even dangerous, when it is merely the expression of a different tradition. And as for the orgiastic aspects of these rites, Haitians have ample opportunity to satisfy their sexual impulses elsewhere, without making this a basic and constant element in the worship of their gods.

[416] [291] [411] [533] [154] 796 796

996 *Vodun* dances, in Mirebalais as elsewhere, take place on

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

steadying his attention, he practically hypnotizes him back into full consciousness. As soon as the possessed is normal again, water out of the calabash is poured at the central post and a sign of the cross is made with the candle before it.

Contrary to the expectation of thrill-seeking white visitors, the Vodun dance does not merit the name of an orgy. True, the dancers wear their old clothes, for they are going to have violent exercise; true also, those who are possessed give the impression of losing some of their inhibitions. But the dancers do not embrace each other as at a white man's dance; the drinking which occurs is hardly ever excessive; and the climax of a successful dance is a religious experience. The Haitian is no more obsessed by sex than is the American; indeed, living simply and without many of the artificial restraints of "civilization," he is probably less so. What white visitors sometimes see, under the impression that they are witnessing a Vodun dance, is nothing more than a secular Saturday night social dance. It, too, has drum rhythms instead of an orchestra, musical instruments being rare in Haiti; but the dance has no more religious (or "Voodoo") significance than a barn dance in the United States.

Creed and practice go hand in hand in Haiti. The Vodun worshiper believes in the loa of his faith and does the things necessary to get in touch with them. These conceptions are the major part of his creed, as the corresponding actions form the bulk of his religious activity.

A few articles of the creed remain. "I believe in respect to twins . . ." Hundreds of so-called primitive peoples see in twins some special significance, now fortunate, now tragic. Many of the tribes along the Atlantic coast of Africa thought of twins as an omen, so that the presence of ritual regard for them in Haiti is hardly surprising. It is probably incorrect to speak of the worship, or the cult, of twins, for they are not deified, nor is there a common ritual for them: thousands of persons pay them no homage whatever. One family has a high regard for twins because it has numbered them among its ancestors or recent relatives; another family pays respect to all twins because a priest has advised seeking the good luck which comes from *marasse* (twins). There seems to be some confusion of thought about this aspect of religion: twins are not gods, but merely omens from the gods; yet sacrifices are made to them. Christmas and harvest are the usual seasons for the offering. Food is prepared in the morning